

The Luckiest Christmas Tree Ever







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By Cathy Marks

Illustrated by Carolyn Ewing

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It was Christmas Eve, and the Christmas tree farm was bustling. Abby, a snowy-white rabbit, noticed a small tree standing alone at the back of the lot. It was a little crooked on one side, and kind of skinny. But it was fresh and green and smelled like Christmas morning.





"Who'd buy such a scrawny little tree?" a gray squirrel named Fizz asked Abby, who was his best friend.

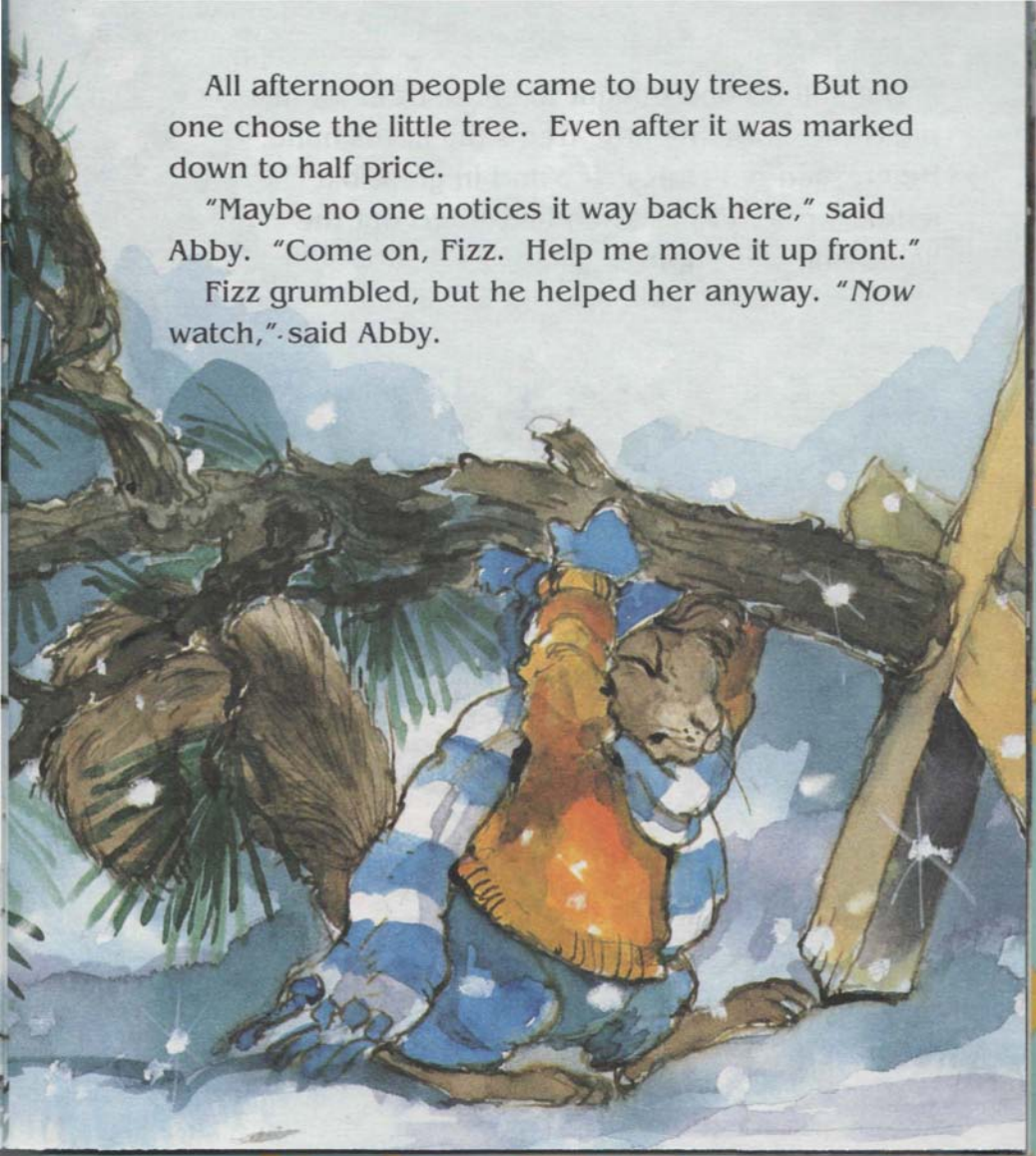
"Someone will. You'll see," Abby answered.



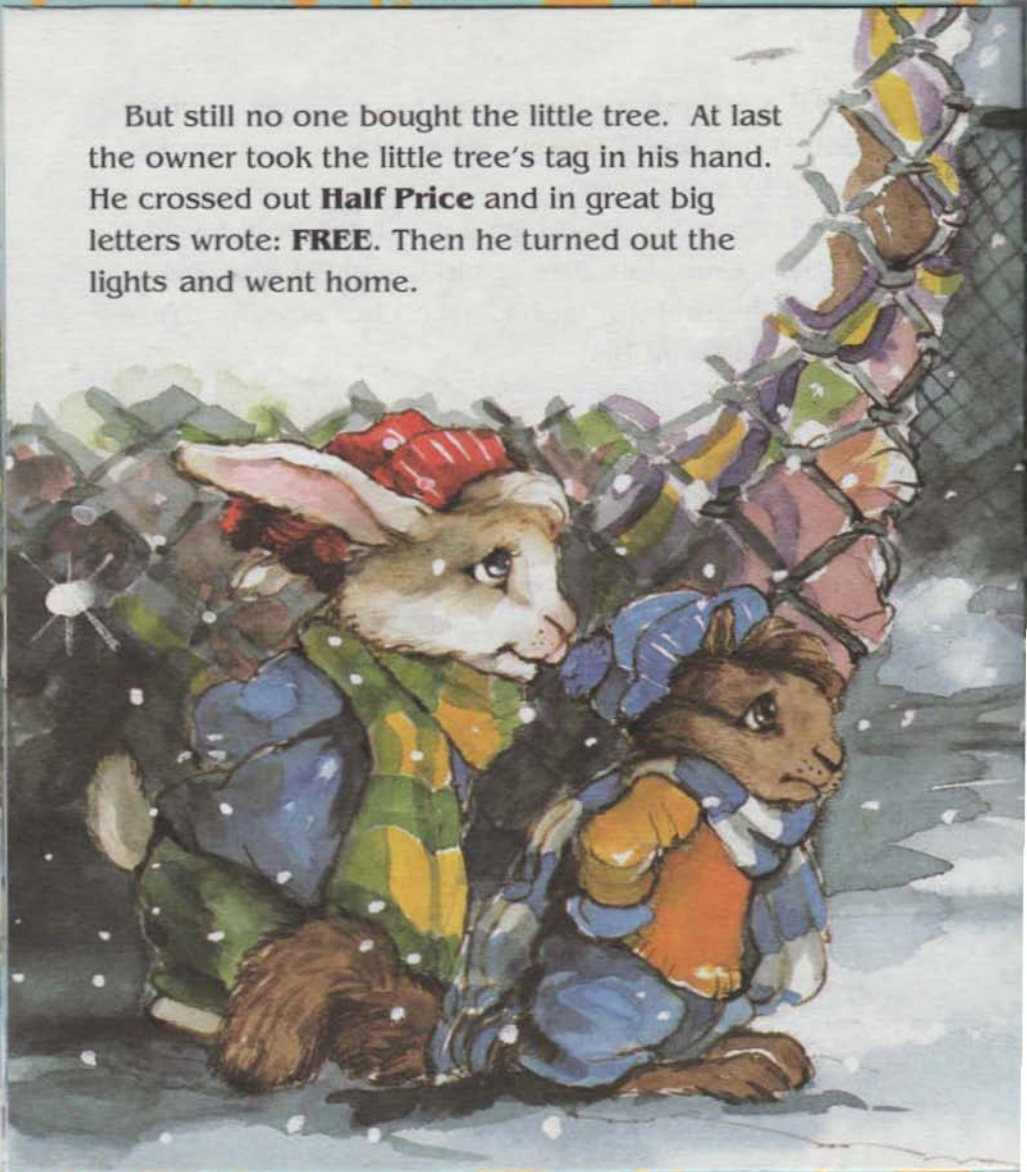
All afternoon people came to buy trees. But no one chose the little tree. Even after it was marked down to half price.

"Maybe no one notices it way back here," said Abby. "Come on, Fizz. Help me move it up front."

Fizz grumbled, but he helped her anyway. "Now watch," said Abby.



But still no one bought the little tree. At last the owner took the little tree's tag in his hand. He crossed out **Half Price** and in great big letters wrote: **FREE**. Then he turned out the lights and went home.



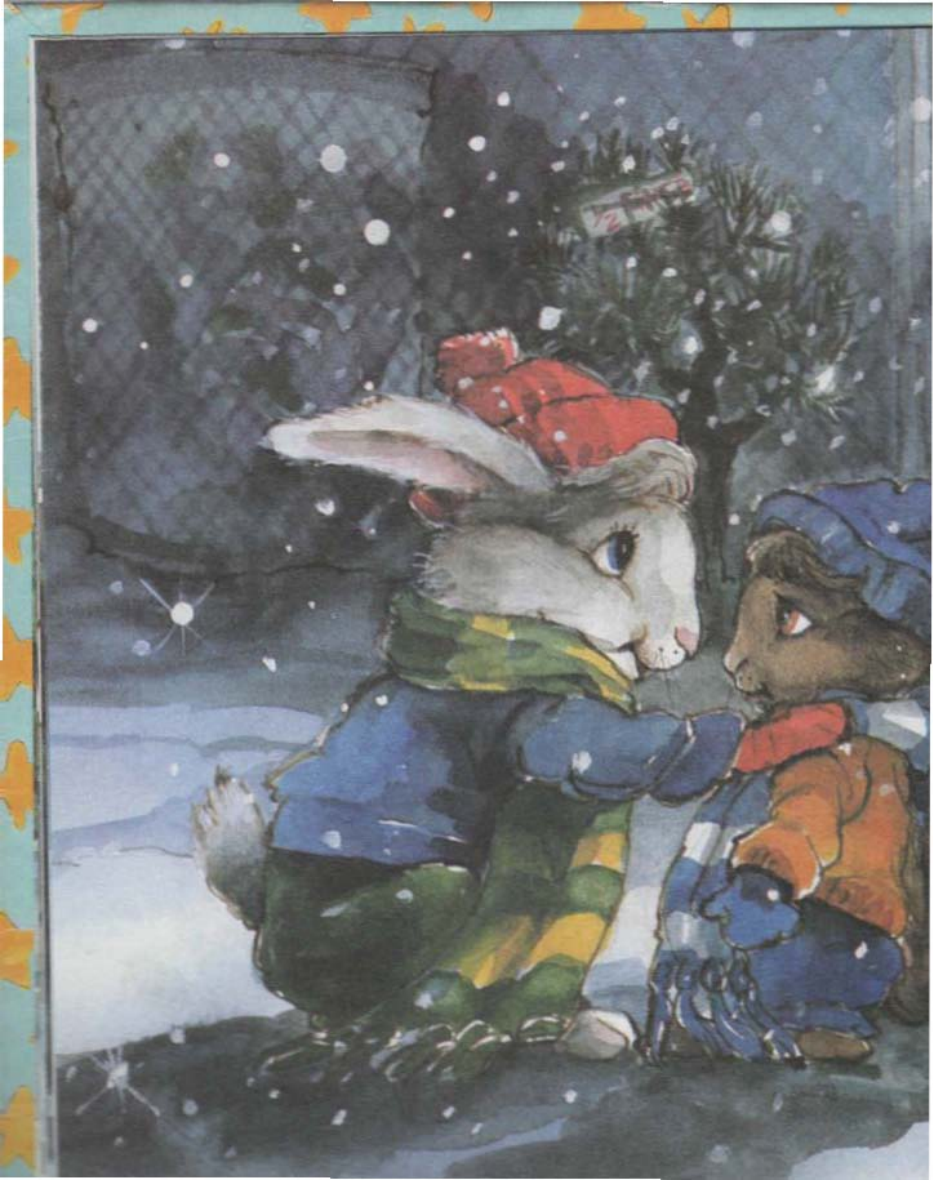




The little tree stood all alone in the moonlight. Abby waited and waited. Soon the town clock struck midnight. "Come on, Abby," said Fizz. "No one's going to take the tree now."

Abby was heartbroken because no one wanted the little tree. With one last look at it, she and Fizz started back into the woods.







Then Abby had an idea. A wonderful Christmas Eve idea.

"We'll decorate the tree ourselves!" Abby said.

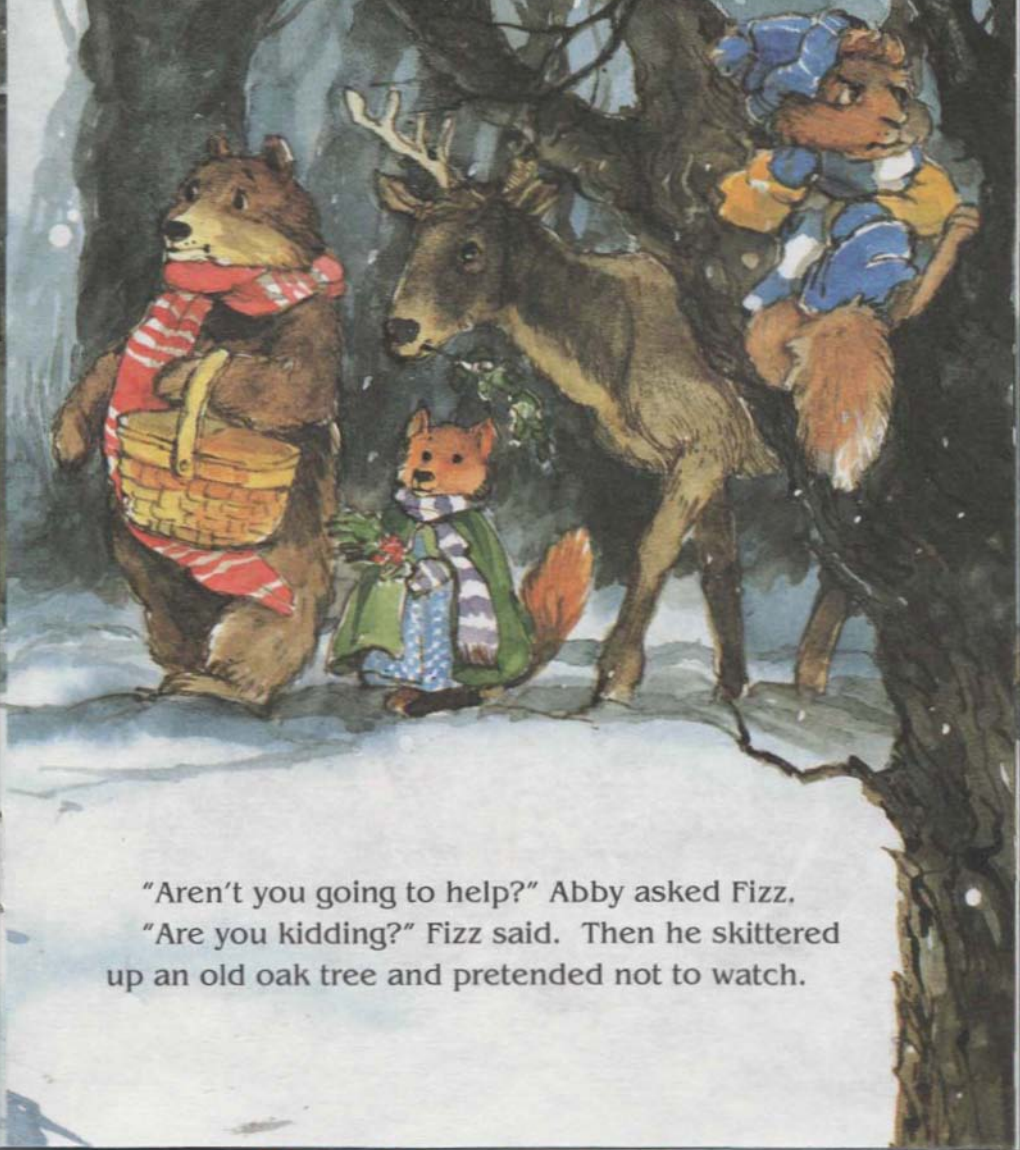
Fizz stared at his friend. "Are you kidding?" he said. "How? We don't have any ornaments or lights or tinsel."

"We have everything we need," said Abby.

"Follow me."

Abby went into the woods to ask her forest friends for help. The elks moved the little tree to a clearing in the forest. Then all the birds and animals decorated the little tree.





"Aren't you going to help?" Abby asked Fizz.
"Are you kidding?" Fizz said. Then he skittered
up an old oak tree and pretended not to watch.

As each animal hung its gift on the tree, Fizz watched in amazement. The tree didn't look so crooked anymore. Its branches seemed fuller. It even seemed taller somehow!









Then Abby brought out her special treasure. It was a bright red woolen scarf—her very favorite. She carefully wrapped it around the bottom of the tree. Then she stepped back to take a look. "It's wearing every color of the rainbow!" she said. "It's beautiful!"

"Wait a minute!" said Fizz.



"I was saving these for something special," Fizz muttered. Then he added his gift to the tree—nuts that he'd been saving since the fall.



"I thought you didn't like this tree," Abby said.
"Are you kidding? This is the most beautiful
tree I ever saw," said Fizz.

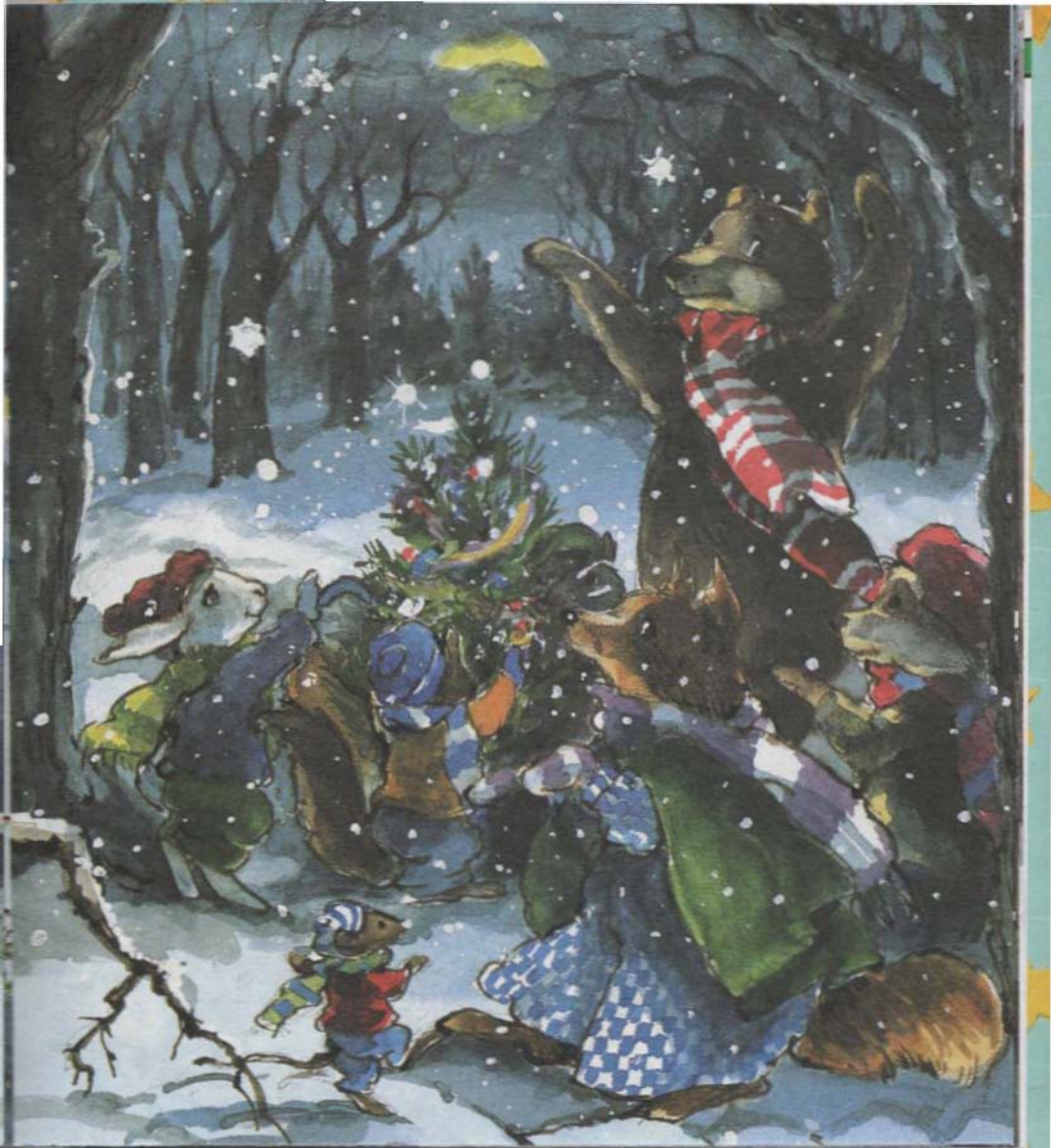


All the animals agreed. And as they admired their work, the night sky gave the little tree one more wonderful gift.

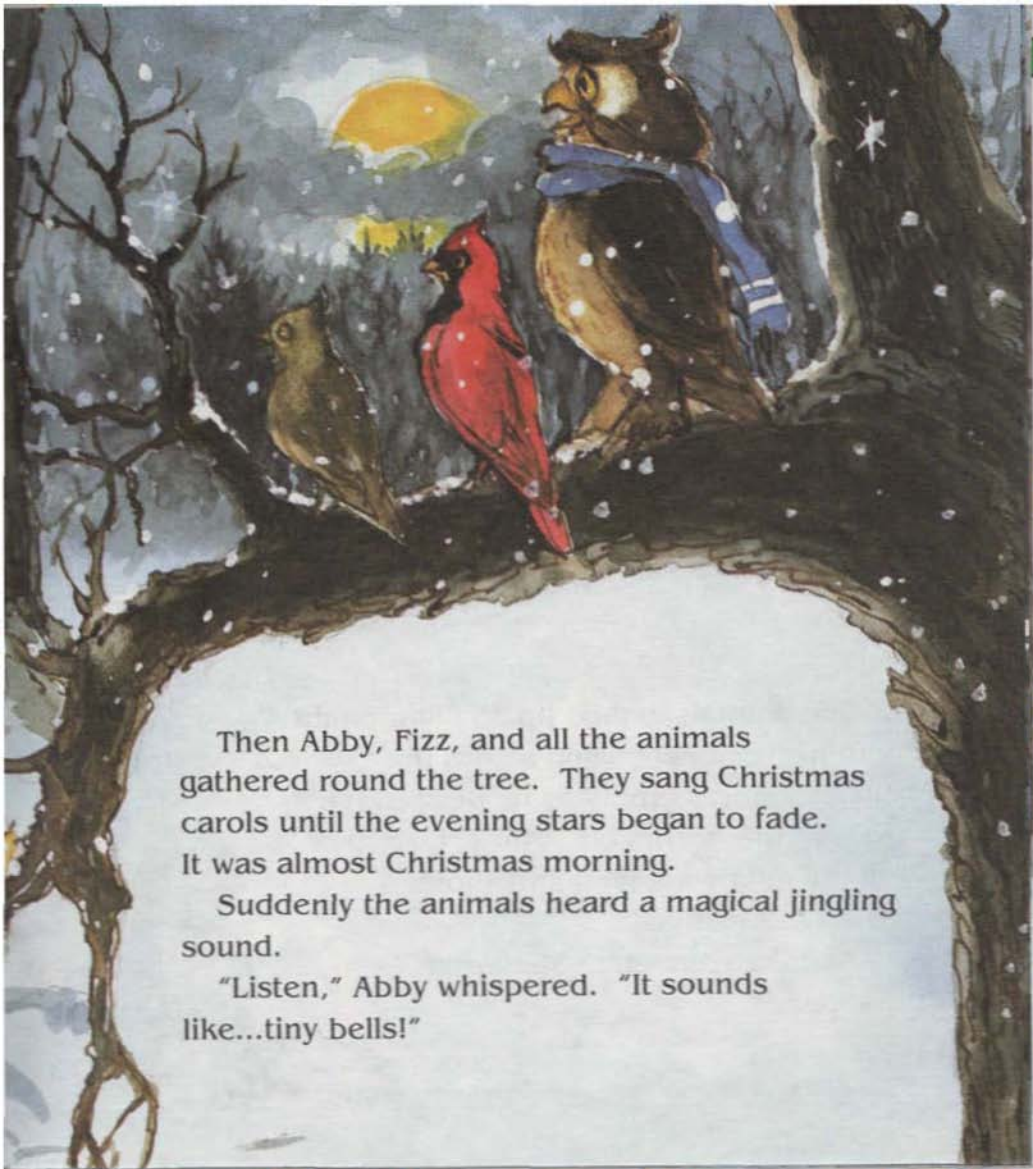
"It's snowing!" said Abby.

And the snow made the little tree's branches sparkle better than any tinsel ever could.

"If only we had a star for the top," said Abby.



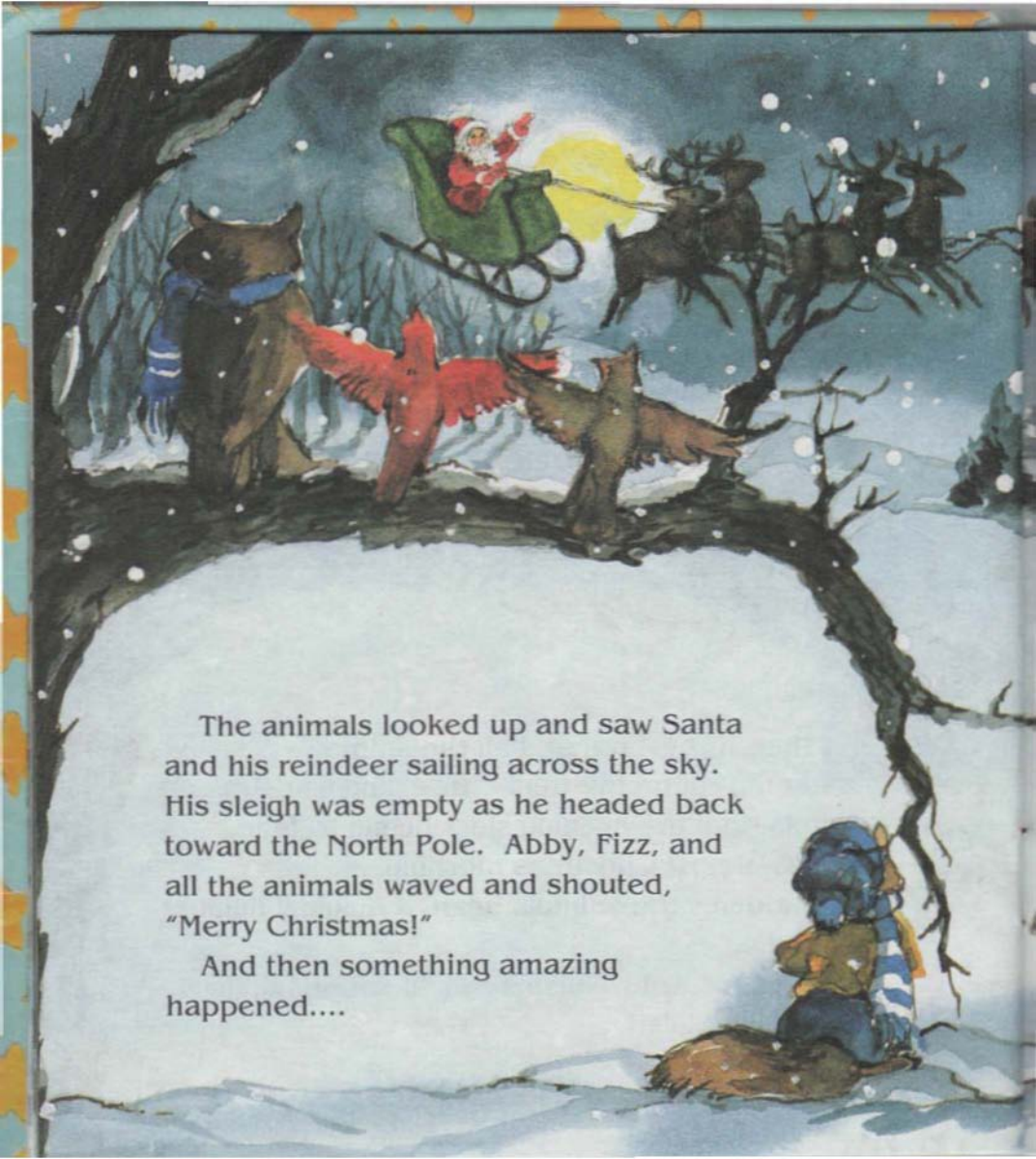




Then Abby, Fizz, and all the animals gathered round the tree. They sang Christmas carols until the evening stars began to fade. It was almost Christmas morning.

Suddenly the animals heard a magical jingling sound.

"Listen," Abby whispered. "It sounds like...tiny bells!"



The animals looked up and saw Santa and his reindeer sailing across the sky. His sleigh was empty as he headed back toward the North Pole. Abby, Fizz, and all the animals waved and shouted, "Merry Christmas!"

And then something amazing happened....





Santa turned his sleigh around!

"What a lovely tree!" Santa said. "I know someone who's been too busy to get a tree this year—someone who would *love* a special tree just like this one."



"Who?" asked Abby.

"Me!" said Santa.

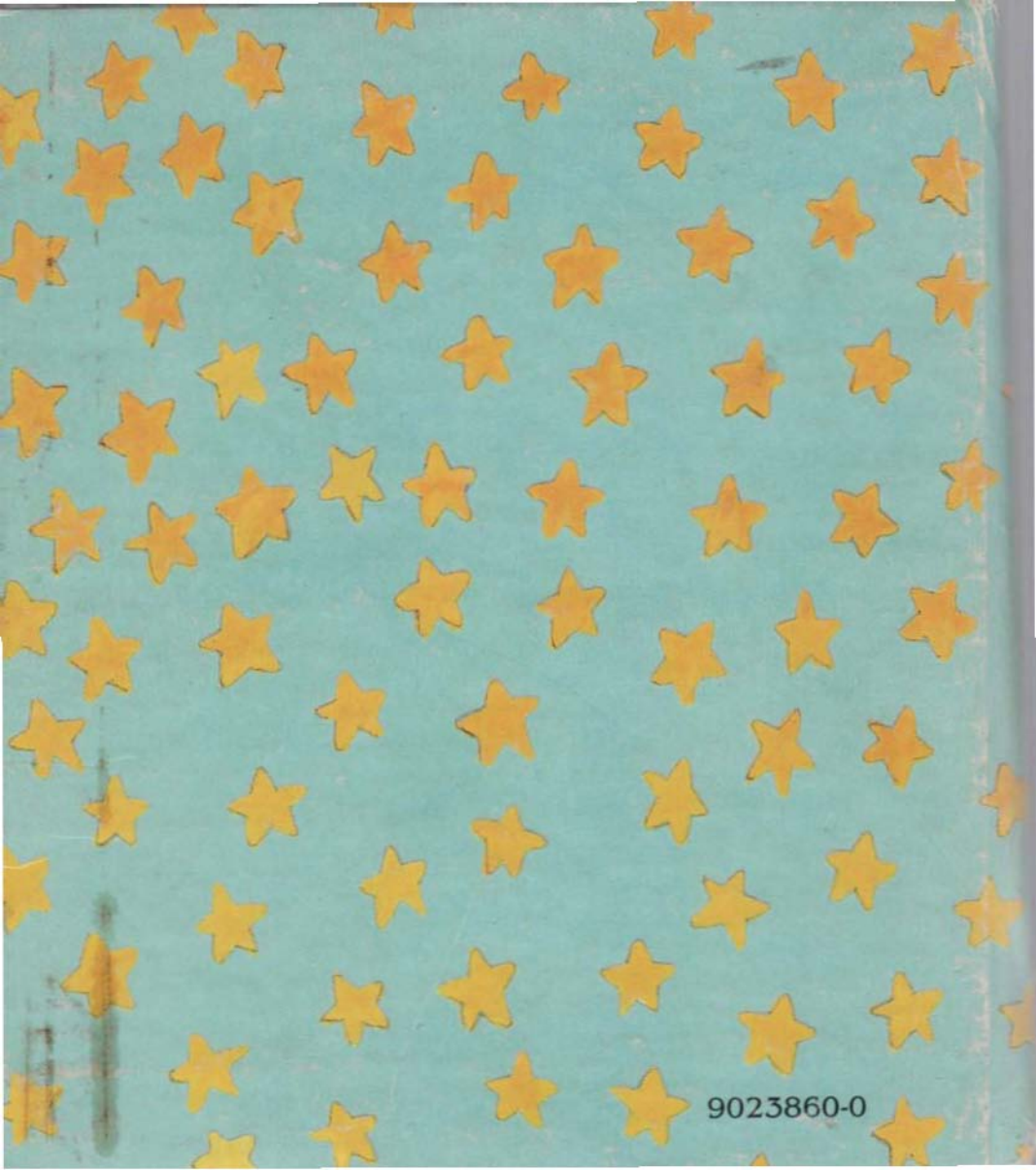
"Oh, Santa!" said Abby. "We'd love it if you took the tree!"



"Merry Christmas!" Santa called as he flew off with the little tree. Then he reached out to catch a falling star from the sky. He put the star on the very top branch of the little tree.

Abby and Fizz smiled. Their little tree was the luckiest Christmas tree ever.





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